

## **King County Response to Inquiries Regarding the Dinner Train**

Thank you for expressing interest in the Eastside Rail Corridor and continued operation of the Spirit of Washington Dinner Train.

The Dinner Train's future is in question because the Burlington Northern Railroad is trying to discontinue operations on the 47-mile Eastside Rail Corridor from Renton to Snohomish and sell the real estate. King County's goal is to save the corridor. If King County cannot acquire the corridor, Burlington Northern may well parcel it off and sell it for its development value. If that happened, the corridor would be lost forever and there would be no freight use, no Dinner Train, no trail use, or any public use.

The County is in the very early stages of the acquisition and due diligence process. The County is completing an appraisal, reviewing title information and evaluating other information about the corridor. Formal negotiations to acquire the corridor have not yet begun.

Burlington Northern operates the Dinner Train on the corridor under a contract with the Dinner Train company that currently ends in November, 2006. The County understands that Burlington Northern and the Dinner Train are in negotiations on an extension for a limited term.

Under federal law, the Dinner Train could acquire the right to continue rail operations on the corridor. However, the likely difficulty for the Dinner Train is that the costs of providing rail service and maintaining the corridor will exceed the revenue that the corridor will generate.

Burlington Northern has indicated that it wants to discontinue operations on the line because the line is no longer economically viable, has experienced declining freight use, and that having passenger service on the line creates substantial liability. King County will explore all corridor use options and their associated costs. But it is important to keep in mind that the Dinner Train is a private for-profit business, and King County cannot use public money to subsidize the private business operations of current users.

Saving the Dinner Train is also not as simple as providing rails with trails. Rails with trails may be the most expensive of all options. In addition, Burlington Northern is not even willing to sell the County the tracks where the Dinner Train starts its operations in Renton.

The Puget Sound Regional Council is embarking on a full study of potential feasible uses of the corridor involving all interested stakeholders. The county is committed to that process. The county believes it is critical to explore all these issues before committing public money to develop the rail corridor or committing to particular uses. Above all, if the county is successful in acquiring the rail corridor, uses on the corridor must best serve the public interest.

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